

Aim of lesson

To show that God keeps his words when he warns of coming judgment, and that he saves those who trust him.

Bible background

Isaiah 36 and 37; 2 Kings 18:9-37; 2 Chronicles 28 and 29.

Outline of lesson

As Hezekiah grew up

Use Isaiah 1:1 to remind the class of the kings who ruled while Isaiah was prophesying. The time chart may also be useful here. This lesson will consider events which took place during the life of King Hezekiah. Isaiah includes four chapters in his prophecy (36-39) about the life of Hezekiah. He obviously thinks we can learn important lessons from him.

Look together at 2 Chronicles 28 to find out what was happening at the time Hezekiah was growing up. The chapter records the actions of King Ahaz who was Hezekiah's father. The class could look, in particular, at verses 1-8 and 19-24. Ask the class to identify the pictures in the workbook. They are intended to represent: (a) The slaughtered army of Judah. (b) Some people taken captive. (c) Ahaz sacrificing one of his sons on the fire. (d) The worship of idols. (e) Ahaz shutting the doors of the Temple and taking away its treasures. (see also 2 Kings 16:10-18 for more details.)

What did Hezekiah think of it all?

Ask the students how they think Hezekiah could have reacted to the events around him as he grew up. The class could think particularly of what Hezekiah might have felt when thinking of the death of several of his brothers (see 2 Chronicles 28:3,7). He could have died in the same way. After the class members have suggested how they think he might have felt, turn to 2 Chronicles 29:1-11 to see what his view of such acts was. The class can then fill in the section on what Hezekiah thought, and they can begin the pictures and/or notes on what he decided to do. Things which could be included are:

- 2 Chronicles 29:3 – He opened the door of the Temple and repaired them.
- v5 – He removed all the rubbish and objects of false worship from the Temple.
- v20-25 – He started the offerings again.
- 2 Chronicles 30:1, 26 – He held the Passover and invited all the tribes.
- 2 Chronicles 31:4 – He reinstated the tithes for the Levites.

God's view of Hezekiah

It would be good at this point to ask the class what they think God's view of Hezekiah would be. Encourage them to list specific reasons why he would be approved by God. He did not let a wicked environment pervert his understanding of what was right. He did not use his upbringing as an excuse. He sought God's way with enthusiasm and energy. Use the ideas that come from the discussion and/or the words from 2 Chronicles 31:20 to fill in the next section in the workbook.

Invasion In the North

An event which must have made a great impression on Hezekiah, was the invasion, capture and deportation of the nation of Israel. The kingdom of Israel had been on the northern border of the kingdom of Judah. At the time of David and Solomon the two kingdoms had been one. The ten tribes in the north had been governed separately since the time of Rehoboam and Jeroboam. The destruction of this kingdom of Israel happened in Hezekiah's fourth year. Though this may have been while he was co-regent with his father, it must have made a deep impression. Read with the class 2 Kings 18:9-12. Look at the map in the workbook to see what was happening. They can write in the arrow words such as 'Assyria invades and captures Israel'. They can draw an arrow to show the deportation of the people of Israel back to Assyria. Many of the people of Israel must have fled to the kingdom of Judah in the south. Hezekiah and his people would have heard many first-hand accounts of the battles, the slaughter and the misery and anguish as people were taken away as slaves. Many would remember Isaiah's words. Ask the class to look back at the prophecy about the vineyard to see which warnings had now been fulfilled. All the details had been fulfilled as God had said. The only striking difference between the parable and the reality so far was that the parable had spoken of the vineyard as Israel and Judah (Isaiah 5:7) yet so far only Israel had received the judgment. The king of Judah must have been keenly aware of this, and it must have spurred his reforms.

Invasion in the South

In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign the threat to the south begins. Sennacherib is now king of Assyria and he attacks and captures all the main cities of Judah except Jerusalem. Hezekiah asks Sennacherib for peace terms and Sennacherib demands a large amount of silver and gold. Hezekiah pays what is demanded but Sennacherib does not stop his attack. He sends his commander to Jerusalem to tell them to give up and accept slavery and deportation without a fight. The details of the commander's mocking speech are included in Isaiah 36. You may like to ask the class to look at some of the verses in the chapter – verses 1-5 and 18-22, for instance.

Hezekiah's reaction is in Isaiah 37. Read with the class v1 -7 or act out Hezekiah sending Eliakim and Shebna to Isaiah and their return with the message from Isaiah. The siege around Jerusalem withdraws for a time as the king of Assyria is threatened from another area, but the commander keeps up the pressure on Jerusalem. He sends a letter to Hezekiah threatening its destruction. Hezekiah takes this letter into the Temple and spreads it out before God. If you have time it is worth reading with the class Isaiah 37:14-23 and 33-38, or asking them to read it at home. Assyria had invaded and destroyed all the land of Judah except Jerusalem. There was no way the people of Jerusalem could save themselves from destruction, but Hezekiah trusted in God, and God saved the city. Isaiah 37 has sections which are suitable to be read in parts, i.e. someone could read the part of Hezekiah, someone else the part of Isaiah etc.

Archaeology

Ask the class to refer to the sheet on archaeology to see Sennacherib's prism on which he boasts that 'Hezekiah the Judean, like a caged bird within the city of Jerusalem his capital, I shut up' but makes no mention of the sudden destruction of his army which led to his return to Assyria. The sheet on archaeology also shows Hezekiah's tunnel. As the Assyrian army threatened to reach Jerusalem, Hezekiah directed the water supply outside the city to within the city walls. It is possible to walk through the tunnel he dug in Jerusalem today. Hezekiah knew the value of having a water supply inside a city when it was besieged, and the disadvantage it would be to the Assyrian army not to have water (2 Chronicles 32:1-5, 30). In the same way, Hezekiah knew that having God with him in the siege was more important even than water.

Digging deeper

Good king, bad king

The students can find out how long each of the kings of Israel ruled, and whether they were good or bad.

Relevance to our lives

God speaks of a coming judgment on the world at the time of the return of Christ. Ask the class what lessons Hezekiah's faith and dedication to God have for us. What difference should it make to our lives?

Prayer

Three prayers of Hezekiah are recorded in the book of Isaiah:

- Hezekiah's plea when threatened by Sennacherib – Isaiah 37:14-20.
- Hezekiah's plea when facing death – Isaiah 38:1-3.
- Hezekiah's thanks and praise when saved from death – Isaiah 38:9-20.

One of these could be used by the class members as a basis for a prayer they might say in similar circumstances.

Other suggestions for activities

- The class might like to find out more about Hezekiah's illness in Isaiah 38 and 2 Kings 20
- An older class may like to look at Isaiah 38 and consider Hezekiah's reactions to facing death. It seems from the dates given that this illness happened during the threat from Sennacherib (see Isaiah 38:6) and before the birth of his son Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1). These factors must have influenced his desire to live.
- The class could continue producing a newspaper of the time of Isaiah. Articles about the battles in the north and the dramatic rescue in the south could be included.